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Title: Tal'khaz-mir [1]

Author:  
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\*a dark tale found  
within a crumbling tome  
in the Necropolis\*

A frosty chill wind  
propelled powdery snow  
through the air with  
stinging pressure, creating  
and building upon  
pre-existent drifts.  
Lightning cracked the  
cloudy sky, and the moon  
above barely pierced the  
canopy of darkness enough  
to illuminate the  
surrounding landscape. It  
was barren here, almost  
mournfully empty; not a  
tree in sight, and the  
only sound was the  
howling wolves and wind.  
The few animals who  
inhabited Dagger Isle  
huddled in their hidden  
caves and dens along the  
mountainside, struggling  
for warmth within their  
thick, pristine hides.

Somewhere along the  
mountain was a passage,  
beaten by snow and ice,  
which lead to an ancient  
network of caves and  
stonework. It was a  
dungeon, Deceit as it  
would later be named, and  
Tal'khaz-mir stood only a  
few feet within, holding a  
torch high in a gloved  
hand. He was bedecked in  
dark, thick robes and  
thigh-high boots, with a  
thick hat and scarf to  
help him stay warm. Down  
here he thought perhaps  
he would be protected  
from the wind, but nay,

there was a deeper chill  
here, one that went  
straight to the bone.

The air stunk of rotting  
flesh, and Tal'khaz-mir  
nearly jumped with  
surprise when he noted a  
distant figure, shambling  
slowly toward him. Hastily,  
his sword was drawn and  
he stepped forward,  
holding it at the ready  
should the figure prove  
hostile. Light from his  
torch glimmered upon his  
polished valorite blade;  
low-burning lamps and  
glowing sigils upon the  
walls and ground added to  
the eerie splendor of  
what seemed like an  
ancient tomb.

As the figure slowly  
limped into the light,  
Tal'khaz gasped in horror.  
Its flesh was covered in  
disgusting wounds, some  
so deep that bone showed  
beneath; it had turned  
green with rot and age,  
and smelled of hollow  
death. There was no life  
in its eyes, only cold  
understanding in its  
purpose. It had to  
protect its home and its  
age-old family, which  
meant adding another to  
the eternal damnation the  
dungeon's curse would  
offer. It crept closer,  
lifting a gnarled arm to  
strike.

The arm was severed  
with the blink of an eye,  
and directly following it  
with a side-swipe of Tal's  
sword was the zombie's  
head. Somehow though,  
bound by magic, it crept  
on, striking with its  
other arm. Tal parried  
the clumsy blow with his  
blade and kicked the foul  
beast in the ribs, sending

it stumbling backward. He advanced and hacked viciously at its leg until it seemed to come apart at the seams. With enough damage dealt, the enchantment was broken and it fell limp to the cold stone floor.

Tal stared at the corpse for a few moments, unblinking, until he heard a strange noise to the northwest, echoing down the hallway. It sounded like a growl, powerfully issued and strong. Never claiming caution over curiosity, the man slowly crept in the direction of the sound, footsteps soft against the stone beneath him, yet loud in the silence that had been undisturbed for so very long. He paused at an intersection; two passages sprung out to his left and right, while the main tunnel kept going straight. He decided to try left, since it was to the west, where he had heard the noise.

Inside the chamber, he could see a brazier filled with glowing red embers. A feeling of dread crept over his figure, pouring into his veins and quickening his heartbeat. Something about this sight defied the natural order without reason, and he could recognize that clearly, that something was very wrong, yet he couldn't put a finger on it. Again, his curiosity won the day, and he stepped closer. Soon, his fear had melted into intrigue, and he was completely fascinated and charmed by the device. He stared at it

unblinking, moving slowly  
closer.

A stiff breeze rushed  
through the room and  
devoured the flame of his  
torch. Tal'khaz-mir did  
not seem to care. He  
dropped the lightless  
object and let his arms  
hang idly at his side,  
having sheathed his sword  
back in the tunnel. He  
could feel the heat of  
the coals on his skin,  
even through his many  
layers of clothing, but he  
still did not seem to  
care. He tilted his head,  
and slowly began to  
extend his hand toward  
the coals. Had he lost his  
mind? Had he gone  
utterly insane?

The hand crept closer and  
closer to the coals; his  
glove caught on fire from  
the heat, spreading to  
the sleeve of his robe,  
but he did not seem to  
care. He layed his hand  
upon the coals, and it  
was then that a mystical  
blue-white energy surged  
through his fingertips and  
channeled up his arm,  
spreading to the rest of  
his body. The heat didn't  
seem to affect his skin,  
leaving no marks or  
burns. Oddly, instead of  
darkening it seemed to  
lighten, growing pale, as  
if he were a ghost.

His eyes gleamed a vile  
red, and slowly he lifted  
his hand from the coals.  
His voice was inhuman and  
low, incredibly powerful.  
"Et aahl az`rah-tu mel  
khas..." His voice slowly  
began to blend from an  
ancient language to the  
modern speech of man.  
"...I am finally free." He

slowly blinked his eyes,  
bowed his head and  
strode back the way he  
had came. Instead of  
turning toward the  
entrance at the  
intersection, though, he  
headed deeper into the  
depths of the dungeon.

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A group of thirteen  
white-robed individuals  
gathered around a massive  
tower built of bone and  
mortar, each chanting  
alone with one another.  
One stood in front of  
the rest, holding a golden  
staff as high as his arm  
would allow. He shouted  
praises to righteous gods,  
willing them to banish  
what they had dubbed a  
temple of evil and dark  
repute. It was known to  
them as destruction,  
darkness, death and decay.  
It was known to those  
who researched as  
Golgotha, the Tower of  
Bone.

A figure stood calmly  
inside, his head shaved  
and bare, pale and  
gleaming in the dim blue  
light cast by runes  
etched into the walls. He  
wore a massive suit of  
gleaming black platemail,  
all save for the helm,  
with a dark blue robe  
worn over it. He held a  
valorite sword, polished  
and well-kept, runes  
carved into the blade  
with a hilt long enough to  
be held with two hands.  
It resembled an ancient  
design used many decades  
before, when raiders had  
first come to the frozen  
slab of rock.

The figure looked up, eyes  
glowing a bright shade of

red, his highly intelligent  
demeanor and strength  
apparent, even without a  
display. The group outside  
could \*feel\* his evil  
throbbing through the  
ground like shockwaves of  
an earthquake, or possibly  
silent thunder pulsing  
through the air in  
crushing waves, the  
heartbeat of a long dead  
island... slowly, the man  
turned, and began to  
ascend the stairwell that  
lead to the tower's roof.  
Bone crunched beneath his  
heavy step, but it  
reformed again behind him,  
stirring until it had  
resumed its original  
position.

The figures outside  
chanted more fervently as  
the silhouette of a man  
appeared on the top of  
the tower, slowly moving  
to its edge and looking  
out at them, a cruel,  
knowing smile upon his  
dark lips. "Mach`ahl-zen..  
bah.. et.. lum.. ol gheist..."  
His words were painfully  
slow, deep and powerful,  
like the concussion blast  
of a vicious explosion.  
Dust spilled past his lips  
with each utterance, as  
if he had not spoken or  
even moved in centuries.  
As the moments passed,  
as each word was spoken,  
he began to speak faster.

"Baal et yahn le pa wael  
mahn..."

The men below froze, as  
if commanded by some  
ancient magic. Their  
breath had been stolen as  
easily as if an  
experienced tailor were  
pulling a needle through  
thin cloth, or a blade  
fresh from the forge  
slicing through already

warm butter. It seemed  
so easy to the seasoned  
force of evil; there was  
no passion to his voice,  
only inflection where the  
spell deemed appropriate.  
Slowly his free hand  
clenched tightly into a  
fist, and he twisted it in  
the empty air, vicious  
cold wind beating against  
his dark gauntlet. The  
men below all fell to  
their knees, clutching  
their hearts, except one,  
the man who held the  
staff.

It seemed as if the  
silence spell had been  
broken, and the  
staff-weilder spun it  
'round twice, uttering a  
single arcane phrase. As  
the spell climaxed, he  
withdrew a gemstone  
from a pocket of his  
robe; it was an odd gem,  
completely round and  
flawless. With the sheer  
strength of his spell, the  
souls of all twelve men  
around him were sucked  
into the gem, and the  
thirteenth, the essence of  
Tal'khaz-mir, the man  
standing atop the tower,  
possessed by daemons,  
was devoured by the gem.  
Twelve guardians in  
eternity for one vile  
demonic force.

The lifeless figure of  
Tal'khaz-mir slowly  
decended into the  
forgotten cellars of  
Golgotha, disappearing into  
darkness, willed there and  
controlled by the evil  
that was Golgotha. The  
robed man smiled  
somerly, turned, and  
stepped away into the  
blinding snowstorm. His  
work was done at the  
cost of twelve comrades,  
who had come unknowing

of what must be done.

\*continued in volume  
two\*